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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 001801

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [EAID](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [DJ](#)

SUBJECT: MORE ON DONOR ACTIVITIES RE:EXPULSIONS

REF: DJIBOUTI 1674

Classified By: CON CBEAMER for 1.5 (band d)

Summary

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1. (C) The Djiboutian Government's announced expulsion order for all undocumented foreigners of August 31, later extended to September 15, brought to the surface the problem of asylum seekers currently in Djibouti. The Djiboutian committee responsible with determining first asylum status has reviewed only 60 cases since 1995 and has not met in several years. UNHCR has some 2,500 registered asylum seekers (largely Oromo Ethiopians), and is dealing with an estimated 6-7,000 people located at the Aouroussa transit center. Djiboutian Interior Minister Abdoulkader Wais has told UN representatives that all of these individuals "shall be treated as asylum seekers." Consequently, UN capacity and resources are being turned from program mandates to address this displacement crisis created by the Djiboutian Government. The National Office for Refugees and Displaced Persons (ONARS), continues to siphon food and supplies to security forces. WFP logistics officer Robert Gillenwater has been threatened with PNG status for his refusal to allow ONARS to divert resources and fears that the Government may escalate obstructionist tactics, potentially including impeding food transshipment to Ethiopia. End Summary.

Aouroussa

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2. (C) In late July upon confirmation from the Djiboutian Interior Minister that the asylum determination committee would reconvene and begin assigning status to claimants UNHCR agreed to recondition a transition center at Aouroussa in the southern district of Ali Sabieh to process asylee claims.

On August 28 UNHCR and WFP received word from Djiboutian authorities that all asylees must be moved to the transit center within 36 hours. They convened a temporary processing center at a Djiboutian soccer stadium and were descended upon by an estimated 10-15,000 people. A decision was made by Djiboutian authorities for security reasons to forward all processing to the Aouroussa transit center. The transit center was built for a capacity of 2,500 to 3,000 and was incapable of dealing with the mass population that camped around it. Initial estimates taken from head of households put the number of people at the camp at 12-15,000. Minister Wais addressed the people at the transit center and asked that only genuine asylum seekers remain. UNHCR rep. Collins Asare believes that 1,500-2,000 individuals have departed the transit center for foreign soil. WFP has been providing one-week emergency food rations to those who leave voluntarily. As time has gone on these individuals begin to realize they will not be receiving first world immigrant status or massive food aid packages. UNHCR estimates that there are 6-7,000 people still clinging to the center.

DONOR MEETING

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3. (C) Donors (France, EU, U.S., UN agencies) met September 24 to discuss the ongoing situation at Aouroussa transit center. UNHCR rep. Collins Asare communicated a government request for transport assistance to help move more people from the transit center to foreign frontiers. The Djiboutian government rented Somaliland trucks for the departure of several hundred individuals but complained they could not afford more. Asare complained that UNHCR did not have any more resources to spare and that it was in the donor interest to move these people now as opposed to feeding them later. The U.S. response was that we had already received and denied a Minister of the Interior request for assistance in this vein. The E.U. response was that the Djiboutian military had plenty of vehicles if they really wanted to transport people. The French response was that the Djiboutian government had not approached them, the Djiboutian government had plenty of resources to accomplish the task, and at most they would consider helping with fuel costs.

4. (C) WFP logistics officer and acting head, Robert

Gillenwater, stated that he continued to battle with ONARS on food distribution to the transit center and existing refugee camps. Gillenwater said that he confirmed his suspicions that food stocks were being diverted to security forces. He feels that the ongoing practice has been to divert the extra food from the inflated numbers at the existing camps to security forces and reports that Djiboutian military and police officials have confirmed his theory. He reports that he has cut assistance to ONARS and his efforts to build their capacity. The Interior Minister has threatened him with PNG status. In a separate meeting with officials from the Presidency Gillenwater reports the President is considering closing ONARS and establishing another government agency to handle these issues. Gillenwater recommends using Crescent Rouge and building there capacity. When questioned as to why WFP did not seek private contractors their transport and delivery services Gillenwater replied that he feared if he pushed the Government too far they would close their port to Ethiopian food aid.

#### EXISTING CAMPS

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15. (C) There have been ongoing debates about the actual number of refugees living in the two existing refugee camps at Ali Adde and Holl Holl. Officially, UNHCR statistics claim there are 21,000. A 2002 repatriation goal of 12,000 people to Somaliland was set of which only 1,800 returned. Thus far this year only 800 people have been repatriated. The Asian Medical Doctors Association (AMDA), charged with providing medical treatment for camp residents, report that they treat between 4-6,000 refugees per month and consistently see the same people. Numerous credible sources (including Conoff) have visited the camps and believe it possible that there are more than 10-12,000 refugees living in the existing camps. It is possible that many of the registered refugees return to the camps to collect their food stipends but live elsewhere. The community refugee representative at the Holl Holl camp is a sitting deputy in the Somaliland Parliament.

#### COMMENT

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16. (C) It seems the Djiboutian Government is coming closer to realizing its objective of a third refugee "camp" in Aouroussa. There remain a significant number of individuals in the camp who are of dubious eligibility for asylum status but who have apparently been anointed asylum seekers by the Minister of the Interior. It will take a strong stance from UNHCR and other UN agencies to counter this effort. UNHCR Director Asare is, however, new and has been asked to carry out a wide range of tasks including clearing his office of corruption, jump starting a dead repatriation process, and now handling a significant new caseload. Djiboutian authorities are pressing both the UNHCR and the WFP hard with a sometimes explicit threat of expulsion for those who do not cooperate.

17. (C) In fact, most of the food aid for Djibouti reaches its intended recipients, but that is due to the hard line set down by the WFP staff in Djibouti who will not accept misallocations. Post intends to support the WFP position with the Djiboutian government. While Gillenwater may be in some risk of expulsion, we feel it highly unlikely that the Djiboutian Government would risk its growing Port business and commercial goodwill with an action so rash and counterproductive as shutting off the flow of Ethiopian food aid.

SMITH